

Sand Castles, Diamonds and Singing Songs of Joy

I grew up close to the sunny, sandy beaches of Southern California so I got to build lots of sand castles, which I loved to do. I had to build them close to the water because the water made the sand stick together. But that meant that when the first big wave of the high tide came in, my sand castle always washed away. Not one of them is still standing.

Sand castles come to mind when I think about what I remember learning in school. I can only recall a handful of state capitals. The moles I couldn't wrap my mind around in High School Chemistry have returned to being the furry little blind creatures to which I can relate. Although I scored in the 99.9% in a national High School math competition, I can no longer plot x or y on anything. I wouldn't recognize the quadratic equation in a line-up nor can I tell you what it's used for. I remember missing the meiosis-mitosis question on my Tenth Grade Biology exam. I never could keep them straight. But in the 40+ years since then, the question has not come up again even one time. When I think of the college exams I stayed up all night studying for, if I had to retake them today, I doubt I'd pass any of them.

Some studies estimate the average person loses 90% of the information they learn in school. I've done my own informal 'research' poll among family and friends and found a similar response unless it was a subject they loved or continued to use in their lives or they had one of those rare photographic memories.

Is there anything I remember from school? Actually, yes.

I remember my Eighth Grade Graduation dance because I had a huge crush on Dan Reed. He was late to math one day because he was out shooting a TV commercial. That's how cool he was. I, on the other hand, was a geek. I stood at least a head taller than every other girl in my class. I had glasses and braces and as if that wasn't awkward enough, my mother had hand-sewn me a pale pink graduation dress to wear to the dance. In a day of mini-skirts, she wanted me to be modest. The white lace scallops at the bottom of the dress fell very modestly below my knees.

So there I was at the dance, hugging the walls, watching everyone out on the dance floor. Especially Dan Reed. And then it happened. He was looking my direction. I checked around to see who he might be looking at, but it was just me standing there. Then he started walking towards me. My heart started racing as he held out his hand, looked me in the eyes, and smiling, asked, "Marlene, would you like to dance?" Of course I was too terrified to actually dance with him and I made up some lame excuse, but inside my heart I was dancing on clouds. The whole detailed event plays through my memory as clearly as if it had happened yesterday.

Overall, the things I remember from school so many years ago are the feelings, the disappointments, the embarrassments and the impressions that went into my heart, not what went into my mind. I earned straight A's in school so I must have had all the 'necessary' information

in my mind at one time, but so much of it has washed away, just like my sand castles.

My school days were filled with information. The fact that I cannot tell you the difference between meiosis and mitosis is of no consequence to the world.

Today is different. Today the buzz words are high-order and critical thinking skills. We administer SAT Reasoning tests to our students so they can demonstrate their proficiency in rejecting all beliefs that cannot be backed by hard evidence. We train kindergartners to rely on that which can be seen, touched and measured. Emotional thinking is frowned upon.

Scientific reasoning reigns supreme.

Which is why we are living in dangerous times.

Hans Christian Andersen wrote a little story 150 years ago warning us of the very danger we are facing. Disney's Frozen is based on this story, but if you've read Hans Christian Andersen's The Snow Queen, you know the movie is much different and they left this part of the story out all together. So I think it's worth taking a few minutes to revisit the story as Hans Christian Andersen told it.

Long, long ago there lived a hobgoblin—a demon, really—who one day made a mirror that had a particular power. Everything that was good or beautiful that was reflected in it was made to look small and ugly while everything that was bad or ugly was magnified, and every little fault could be plainly seen.

The scholars in his demon school carried the mirror all over the world until there wasn't a land or a people who had not been looked at in this distorted mirror. They thought it would look even funnier if they could carry it high up into the heavens to look at the angels in it, but the higher they rose, the slipper the mirror became until it slipped from their fingers and crashed to the earth, shattering into millions of pieces.

Now the mirror caused even more unhappiness for if a speck no larger than a grain of sand lodged in a person's eye, it had the property of the whole mirror and they viewed everything the wrong way. They could neither see rightly or justly. And even worse, if a tiny shard entered the heart, the heart grew as cold as ice. The pieces soon covered the whole earth.

The demon laughed so hard at the mischief he had caused that he nearly split his sides.

Now, in a large town lived two poor little children who loved each other dearly. Kay and Gerda often played under the red rose bush that grew near their homes. One day, just as the clock struck twelve, Kay said, "Oh! Something has struck my heart. And it feels like there's something in my eye." When Gerda asked what was wrong and started to cry, Kay mockingly told her to stop crying because she looked so ugly when she cried. There was nothing wrong with him. "But look!" he said. "Look at the worm on that rose and why is that rose crooked? And what an ugly little box they grow in." He kicked the box and ripped off the two roses as he

ran off to play with the boys.

By and by he began to make fun of the townspeople and the people laughed and thought he was very clever. He now thought the picture books and stories his grandmother told were very stupid.

One day as he was playing on his sleigh, a large white sleigh carrying a white figure wrapped in white fur circled the field. Kay was intrigued, grabbed hold of the back of the sleigh and off they flew. Faster and faster they went. He tried to let go, but he couldn't. He was afraid and tried to pray, but all he could remember were his multiplication tables. At long last, the sleigh stopped and the driver stood up. She was tall and beautiful—a Snow Queen. She opened her warm fur coat for Kay to snuggle in. “Are you still cold?” she asked as she kissed his forehead. Although his heart was now almost a lump of ice, he somehow no longer felt cold or afraid.

He thought the face of the Snow Queen was the most beautiful he had ever seen. He could imagine nothing more perfect. He proudly told her he could do arithmetic as far as fractions in his head and that he knew the number of square miles and number of inhabitants in the country and the Snow Queen smiled. Off they flew again, over woods and lakes, over sea and land. And Kay felt perfectly safe.

Meanwhile, little Gerda didn't believe what the townspeople said—that Kay must have drowned in the river. She set off to search for him and after a hard and difficult journey, arrived at the magnificent ice palace of the Snow Queen. There were hundreds of empty, vast and cold rooms in the palace, all made of drifted snow. The largest hall stretched for several miles. In the midst of this empty, endless hall of snow was a frozen lake and there, in the center of it, stood the Snow Queen. She called the lake ‘The Mirror of Reason’ and said it was the best, and indeed the only one, in the world.

When Gerda finally found little Kay, he was quite blue with cold—almost black. But he didn't feel it, for the Snow Queen had kissed away his icy shiverings. There he was, dragging sharp, flat pieces of ice to and fro, trying to get them to fit together in different ways. It was the icy game of reason he was playing and in his eyes, the figures he created were very remarkable and of the highest importance. Yet, try though he may, he could not create the one figure he desperately wanted to make. He was trying to form the word, “Eternity”, for the Snow Queen had told him, “When you find out this, you shall be your own master, and I will give you the whole world and a new pair of skates.”

Gerda ran to Kay and threw her arms around his neck. “Kay, dear little Kay! I've found you at last!” But he sat quite still, stiff and cold. Then Gerda wept hot tears that penetrated his heart and began to melt the lump of ice until Kay also burst into tears, washing away the speck that had lodged in his eye. “Gerda, where have you been and where am I?” As he looked all around him, he exclaimed, “How cold it is, and how large and empty it all looks.” The two danced, crying tears of joy, until they fell to the ground, wrapped in each other's arms. And as they lay there, their figure formed—at last—the word “Eternity” and Kay was forever free from the Snow Queen's power.

The two made their way back to their red rose bush where they both sat, grown up, yet children at heart—and it was summer, warm, beautiful summer.

I see evidence of the Snow Queen's influence all around us. The which is good and wholesome is made to look small and insignificant, even ridiculed, while the bad and the ugly is magnified. That which used to be good is now called evil and that which was evil is now called good. The biographies written 100 years ago inspired hearts. Today, we've knocked all our old heroes off their pedestals and their modern biographers focus on their flaws and weaknesses.

The comments in comment sections are mean-spirited and cruel. Intellectuals mock feelings and demand scientific studies and factual evidence as the only grounds for discussion. If an idea cannot be measured or tested, it is rejected. Emotion is scorned.

I often pick up old children's books at book sales and then go online to read what other people have said about the books. I find comments like these:

"This book changed my life."

"I've read it so many times, my copy is falling apart."

"The pages of my book are covered with tears."

"I read the book 60 years ago and I just reread it. I love it even more today than I did then."

These comments are made by an older pre-Snow Queen generation. Then I read comments made about the same book by young readers today:

"This is the most boring book I've ever read."

"I hated this book. No one should ever have to read it."

"It moved so slowly, I wanted to die."

"I hated all those feelings."

This shift from heart to mind hasn't happened by accident or overnight. It's been by design and with steady effort. Many of the most influential men and women of the last century, particularly those who influence education, have dreamed of a world governed by reason. Reason, they say, will give us solutions to all our problems. Reason can give us a new moral code that's more realistic and practical. And what reasonable person would ever think war is reasonable? Their philosophy can be summed up with these words found in A Humanist Manifesto: "Reason and intelligence are the most effective instruments that humankind possesses. There is no substitute."

Those sound like Snow Queen words, don't they?

The experiment has gone on long enough to see the results and the result is, the world has turned upside down.

It's a grave mistake to train the intellect of a child before we have tended to his heart. Much of the frustration of young kids in school comes from forcing them to engage in academic activities

for which they are not developmentally ready. We ignore the fact that childhood years have been reserved by our Creator for warming their hearts. Children can feel before they can reason.

But we've tasted the fruits of science and technology and they taste really good. We can hardly wait to see science's next big reveal or technology's latest gadget. And there's nothing wrong with that. It's all very exciting. We do want children to develop scientific reasoning and critical thinking skills. We want scientists and engineers. But it needs to happen in its proper order: heart first and then mind.

And the reason for that is clear.

Science and technology in the hands of evil or foolish hearts can and will destroy us. Only when it is in the hands of good and wise hearts will it bless us.

Science is a wonderful servant but a dangerous master.

By abandoning making long-lasting impressions on the heart in favor of facts and information in childhood years, we've created a massive educational system of sand castles. But it's not only our learning we're having a hard time hold on to. Everything around us is getting slipperier. We're having a hard time holding on to our jobs, our homes, our money, our relationships, our faith—even our freedom. I blame the Snow Queen's hold on us. Only by paying proper attention to 'heart' can we bring our world back into balance.

For the amount of time, money and worry that go into educating our kids, I'm not satisfied with sand castles, as fun as they are to build. I want diamonds. Diamonds are one of the few things in our world that don't decay or fall apart over time. If I find a diamond that was buried in a treasure chest 1000 years ago, it will still sparkle today just as brightly as the day it was buried. Diamonds are forever.

I want a 'forever' system of education.

I want learning that will last.

Which is why I am a big proponent of common core standards. I think that not only all 50 of our states should adopt common core standards, I believe the whole world will benefit from them. But the common core standards I have in mind are not the ones being implemented in our schools because I have a different objective in mind. Our schools hope to make our children college and career ready. They want to prepare global workers for the global economy. I think our kids deserve much more than that. We can't go wrong when we align our will to God's, and His will is: "Man is that he might have joy." So my objective is to prepare children to live lives of maximum everlasting joy, in which a job will certainly be part of the journey, but will not be the ultimate destination.

My proposed common core standards won't require any governor's signature or committee to debate them. They need no federal funding. In fact, they don't need any funding at all. They're

free to implement. And they can be implemented starting today, in your home and in mine.

These common core standards provide the antidote to the Snow Queen's poison.

I have them from high authority.

The site for the current standards says they can explain theirs in 3 minutes. I can express mine in just 3 words:

1: Faith 2: Hope and 3: Charity

Let me show you what they look like.

FAITH

Faith is the first thing to go in a Snow Queen's reign because she demands full trust in only those things that can be seen, tested and measured. Faith, on the other hand, requires us to trust in a higher force or power that usually can't be seen and often asks us to suspend reason. Reason would have had the children of Israel surrender to Pharaoh's army. What possible chance did they have? Only faith would have thought of parting the Red Sea so they could cross safely on dry ground.

The world seeks Truth by Reason. God teaches, "There is a Spirit in man: and the inspiration of the Almighty giveth them understanding." And He reveals that understanding of truth with a feeling..a burning... in our hearts. We feel when something is right. In our day, we see men ever learning but never coming to a knowledge of the Truth.

Truth, Light, Spirit, and Living Water are all words that are used interchangeably in the scriptures to describe what I call spiritual sunshine and we all know what would happen to us if the sun stopped shining. It requires faith to believe in its existence. It can't be studied under a microscope, but you know when it's present because in its rays is felt love, joy, peace, patience, gentleness, goodness and meekness. It infuses joy into our souls and becomes part of us which is what differentiates it from mere pleasure. Pleasure is usually temporal and temporary. The pleasure of eating a chocolate chip cookie lasts only last long as the cookie. Spiritual light, on the other hand, is satisfying and everlasting.

All light can be traced back to its source and I know of only One who has claimed to be the source of this Light I am describing. The good news is He freely shines His light on everyone—the believer and the unbeliever. What varies from person to person is the capacity to capture this light. The greater the capacity, the greater the joy. The value of a diamond is also determined by its capacity to capture light. Some diamonds sparkle more than others.

Spiritual sunshine quickens feelings; it animates us and makes us feel alive. It opens up our understanding. To be 'inspired' literally means to take in breath or to take 'in spirit'. Brahms relied upon inspiration to compose his music. He described the process this way:

‘I will now tell you...about my method of communicating with the Infinite, for all truly inspire ideas come from God. Beethoven, who was my ideal, was well aware of this. When I feel the urge, I begin by appealing directly to my Maker...Straightway the ideas flow in upon me, directly from God, and not only do I see distinct themes in my mind’s eye, but they are clothed in the right forms, harmonies and orchestrations.’

He went on to say it was the same power by which all the great composers like Mozart, Schubert, Bach and Beethoven drew their inspirations.

Is the day of greatness behind us? I like the hopeful words of Orson Whitney who said, “We will yet have Miltons and Shakespeares of our own. God’s ammunition is not exhausted. His brightest spirits are held in reserve for the latter times.” But I can’t see it happening until we undo the damage of the Snow Queen and re-open the channels of inspiration to our children.

Which brings me to my Common Core Standard for Faith: Prepare the child’s heart to be inspired.

Goethe was asked how he kept spiritual light flowing inward. His response was that everyday, he gazed upon a masterpiece of fine art, read a piece of fine literature, recited a selection of poetry and listened to beautiful music—exactly the things the Snow Queen is eliminating from our classrooms. She may argue with me that they’re there, but what is remaining of the Arts is to be looked upon and analyzed with intellectual eyes, not felt by the heart. She doesn’t trust the heart.

By filling the hearts of our children with beautiful images of art, literature and poetry, we are giving the Spirit something to light up. If I go out on a dark summer night with a flashlight and shine the beam straight up in the air, I won’t see the light unless it reflects off dust particles in the air or maybe an occasional moth. To really see the light, I need to shine it on the leaves of the trees or the ground ahead of me. We can increase the light within our souls and the souls of our children by giving the Spirit a large surface area to light up. By following the admonition of Paul and treasuring up in our hearts those things which are virtuous and lovely and of good report and praiseworthy, we provide lots of surface area for the Spirit to light up. Light cleaves to light. And in that Light will be felt great joy.

When we block spiritual sunshine, the same thing happens to our world as happens to a flower bed that is covered with a sun-blocking tarp: everything underneath it begins to rot and decay.

If we wish to prepare our children’s hearts to be inspired, we need to give the Spirit room to do its work. Several months ago, I was looking for Christmas stories to include in our Christmas volume. When I finished reading one of the selections, I was so overcome with emotion, I buried my face in my hands at my desk and wept. The emotions I felt made me want to be kinder; to be better. They lifted me up. I felt my heart enlarging. The book itself was not a literary masterpiece. It was sentimental and predictable—no action scenes or compelling conflict to resolve. There were even hints of political incorrectness. Despite all these things, I felt my soul being filled.

Had I read the book in school, I'm sure I would have been asked to pinpoint character, plot and setting. I may have been asked to search for and circle use of literary devices such as alliteration or compare and contrast two of the characters. I might have been required to identify and analyze what words the writer used to evoke emotion. I'm sure I would have been given a list of questions to answer about the text. And in the process, it would have killed the Spirit of the story.

The letter killeth, but the spirit giveth life.

When heart work is going on, often silence is the best teaching method. The deeper a message travels into the heart, the fewer words there are to describe the feeling. The ocean at its greatest depth is silent. The Spirit communicates with the 'deeps' of our souls.

Allowing room for the Spirit to work is a big part of applying the Common Core Standard of Faith: Preparing our children's hearts to be inspired. As we make room for the Spirit to work, we'll keep spiritual sunshine flowing in our world.

HOPE

Hope has been the second casualty of the Snow Queen's reign. Hope is an expectation or desire for something better and is what keeps us moving forward. Hope is dependent on vision—"Where there is no vision, the people perish." Nothing has ever been created or accomplished that didn't first exist as an image or as a vision in someone's heart.

In the excitement of filling our children's mind with facts and information, stories have been left behind. Yet, it's the stories that give vision to our hearts. They illustrate life. They set dreams in motion. Our children need to clearly see all the possibilities of life. And for the most joyful life, they need to see what 'good' looks like. The Snow Queen may argue that being 'pure' is old-fashioned and unreasonable, but it's the diamond of greatest purity that is the most prized. The flawless diamond is virtually incorruptible.

The world's vision for our youth is not the Lord's vision. I am not alone in the belief that His long awaited kingdom is about to be established here upon the earth. This is not the day for building sand castles. This is a day for diamonds.

Most diamonds are formed under prolonged periods of high heat and intense pressure, a process that can be repeated to make the diamond harder. Diamond souls fit for the Kingdom of God will be formed in the same way.

One night I was saying my usual prayer: "Please watch over my children. Keep them safe from all harm or accident. Bless them with health and strength and with every good desire." But this particular night, my prayer was gently interrupted with these words that formed in my mind, "Marlene, are you asking Me to keep them from the very means that have brought you to know Me?" I knew it was true. It wasn't the times when everything was going right that I felt His power. It was those times when I was backed to the wall with nowhere to go—the times when

Reason offered no solution—that I experienced His miracles and felt His healing spirit pour into my soul. Yet, it didn't seem right to pray that horrible things would happen to my children. So I said, "Then I'm not sure what to pray for." Immediately, the sweet feeling came, "Pray for more trust in Me." That's a much harder prayer to pray, but I'm trying.

What we can do to keep hope alive in the hearts of our children through the troubling but necessary diamond forming stretches ahead is to make sure we have filled their reservoir of stories with examples of others who have struggled through challenges and overcome difficulties. We need to give them a vision of the world as it can be to look forward to. And especially, we need to show them what faith in God looks like. They need to know God always keeps His promises and that nothing is impossible to Him. It's the diamond souls with clear vision who will stand strong when everything around them is falling apart. They will inspire hope in those whose hearts are weak.

By giving our children a vision of good things to hope for—the second Common Core standard—we will ensure there will be diamond souls who can withstand the heat and lift those around them to higher ground in the days ahead. Their hearts will not fail them.

CHARITY

Charity is the pure love of Christ and this Love is the superglue of the universe. Take love out of a marriage, and the marriage falls apart. Take love out of a family, and the family breaks up. Take away love of one's country—patriotism—and the nation starts to crumble. Take away love of God, and faith vanishes. Take love out of learning, and the learning doesn't stick.

This pure love is a gift of spiritual sunshine. As the Snow Queen blocks access to that Light, love grows colder. But by following Common Core Standard One, our children's hearts will be *inspired*, and in the light of that Spirit, the hearts of our children will be filled with pure love. It's not enough to just capture that love, though. The love needs to be put to use and reflected outwards. Likewise, the value of a diamond is not just in its capacity to capture light; it's also in its capacity to reflect that light.

In Robert Browning's *Paracelsus*, Festus and Paracelsus are lifelong friends. Paracelsus longs for the life of the scholar. He can imagine no greater happiness than uninterrupted time with his books, digging out the deep meaning of the truth of the ages. Surely, this will be his great gift to mankind—to share his vast knowledge and understanding.

The two friends meet twenty years later. Paracelsus is a wreck; he's miserable and he's dying. But he has learned a priceless lesson—though too late for himself—as he now understands: "There is an answer to the passionate longings of the heart for fulness, and I knew it. And the answer is this: Live in all things outside yourself by love and you will have joy. This is the life of God; it ought to be our life."

There is a right use and a wrong use for all things. If you tweak the word 'righteousness' just a little, you have 'right-use-ness'. The right use yield joy. The wrong use yields sorrow. This

standard of right-use-ness can be applied to business, money, education, art, music, the internet, sex—everything in our world—great blessings in their right-use and great sorrow in their mis-use. Common Core Standard 3 is: Teach the right-use of all things in love. It's a formula for long-lasting joy. In the world's economy, the richest man is the one with the most money. In heaven's economy, the richest man is the one with the greatest capacity for joy. As love increases, joy increases. If we wish our children to be heavenly rich, we will need to give them a clear vision of what love looks like: Love suffereth long, and is kind. Love envieth not; vaunteth not itself, is not puffed up, does not behave itself unseemly, seeketh not her own, is not easily provoked, thinketh no evil; rejoiceth not in iniquity, but rejoiceth in truth." Ten years ago, the American Psychiatric Association revealed a study where they estimated the average 18 year old in the United States will have viewed over 16,000 violent deaths and over 200,000 acts of violence. How many acts of love will we have given them to view in those same formative years?

How important is this love? Let me put it this way.

One day I asked my husband to go to the store and buy me some broccoli for a casserole I was making. When he came home, he had several bags of groceries on his arms. There was milk and bread and butter, cookies, chips and cereal. Although everything he brought home was good, the one thing I needed wasn't there: the broccoli.

Love is the broccoli of life.

To paraphrase I Corinthians, though a child should score a perfect score on the SAT, graduate with honors from Harvard, write a New York times bestseller, head up a major corporation, find the cure for cancer or be awarded the Nobel Peace Prize, if that child has not love, he is as sounding brass or tinkling cymbals.

On the other hand, though a child speaks not three languages, fails Algebra twice, cannot compare or contrast two characters in two major works of literature, never marries, lives out his life in a small one-room cottage and never does one single notable act in the eyes of the world, if that child's heart reflects love towards all God's creations, he will find his name in God's book of everlasting treasures.

He shall have discovered 'Eternity' and will have become master of his own soul.

God is Love.

Now, I believe common core standards need frequent assessments. In fact, I recommend a daily test be administered to every parent. The same three test questions can be used each day:

Question One: Today, what did I do to prepare my child's heart to be inspired?

Question Two: Today, what vision of great things did I give my child to hope for?

Question Three: Today, what did I teach the right-use of in love?

If we adopt these three common core standards, the outcome that we can expect is to see a new heart and a new world emerge in just a few years—a Golden Age of peace.

For thousands of years, poets, prophets and sages—the dreamers of the world—have longed for a world of peace ruled by love, beauty and justice. Yet, the history of the world has been almost one continuous story of war and bloodshed; of conquering and being conquered. Still, the dream persists.

Julia Ward Howe, who gave us our Battle Hymn of the Republic, shared this vision:

“One night I experienced a sudden awakening. I had a vision of a new era which is to dawn for mankind and in which men and women are battling unitedly for the uplifting of the race.

“There seemed to be a new, a wondrous permeating light, the glory of which I cannot attempt to put in human words—the light of new-born hope blazing. And then I saw victory. All of evil was gone from the earth. Misery was blotted out. Mankind was ready to march forward in a new era of human understanding—the era of perfect love, of peace, passing all understanding.”

Upon being awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 1954, Albert Schweitzer gave these words in a memorable speech:

“The idea that the reign of peace must come one day has been given expression by a number of peoples who have attained a certain level of civilization. In Palestine it appeared for the first time in the words of the prophet Amos in the eighth century B.C. and it continues to live in the Jewish and Christian religions as the belief in the Kingdom of God. It figures in the doctrine taught by the great Chinese thinkers: Confucius and Lao-tse in the sixth century B.C.. It reappears in Tolstoy and in other contemporary European thinkers. People have labeled it a utopia. But the situation today is such that it must become reality in one way or another; otherwise mankind will perish...

“Decisive steps must be taken to ensure peace, and decisive results obtained without delay. Only through the spirit can all this be done. Is the spirit capable of achieving what we in our distress must expect of it? Let us not underestimate its power, the evidence of which can be seen throughout the history of mankind. ..

“Many a truth has lain unnoticed for a long time, ignored simply because no one perceived its potential for becoming reality.”

Faith, Hope and Charity will lift our world.

To borrow the words from another dreamer: “What shall I say.. To awaken in your hearts...the desire to realize this glorious anticipation?...I can only call upon God...to make my words as sparks of fire, to fall upon the tinder of your hearts and kindle them into flame. That from this hour your souls may be lit up with the light of your glorious destiny, that you may live for God and his kingdom, not simply for yourselves and the perishable things of the earth.”

Or in other words, to live for diamonds, not just sand castles.

Do you remember the Magic Eye books that were popular a few years back? When you looked at the pages, they just looked like random designs. But if you looked at them long enough and in just the right way, a clear 3D image would suddenly pop out at you. I had a Magic Eye moment with history recently. That's the best way I can describe it. I had been studying the stories of many of the nations of the world and I was looking at a world map, thinking of these stories. As I looked at each country one at a time, I noticed how many of them had a time in history when they seemed to take center stage, with a spotlight shown on them. And in that light, they left a lesson for the world, and then faded into the background and another nation took its turn. I thought about what I had learned from each one;

Ancient Greece: beauty

Ancient Rome: law and justice

China: respect for elders and honoring ancestors

France: equality and equal justice

Israel (Hebrews) –the fatherhood of God and liberty in law

Saracens: love of learning in an atmosphere of freedom

India: power of peaceful measures

Africa: simple and pure faith emerging

Native Americans: reverence for Nature

England: refinement through literature

Holland, Scotland/Ireland: liberty is worth dying for

It was primarily Irish and Scotch blood that flowed in the veins of our early patriot fighters.

Other nations left behind painful lessons. They showed us the misery and suffering under the hands of tyranny and oppression. They taught us about the cruelty of greed and corruption in nations whose highest ideal is gold. And they displayed the savagery and barbarism—the rot and decay—when spiritual darkness set in.

Some people are offended at the thought of American exceptionalism. I am not. I say to the world, we are exceptional because we are your children. Admittedly, lately we have behaved as spoiled children always do who are lavished with too many unearned gifts. But please give us another chance. Let us turn our hearts once again to you, our fathers, and learn from your stories all the lessons you have taught us. And from those many stories, let us, for the first time in human history, gather them into one great whole—e pluribus unum, out of many, one.

But there is one story, one lesson, one Truth that has not yet been brought to center stage for all the world to see—Maybe America has not yet had her chance to shine. Maybe this final story before ushering in an era of peace will be ours to tell. Interestingly, it's a story embedded deeply in the spirit of the German people, and according to the 2000 Census, there are more Americans with German roots than any other single nationality. Wagner, the great German composer, set the story to music. It's the story found in part in *The Niebelungenlied* and it briefly goes like this:

In the Rhine River lived three beautiful maidens—the Rhine daughters. Carelessly, one day, they lost the gold that had been entrusted to them by their father. They knew whoever molded the gold into a ring would have all power upon the earth, save love. The hideous little creature, Alberich the Niebelung, who seized it, laughed wickedly, “What do I care for love if I have all the gold I want?” Under his cruel power, the people cried out, “That wretched Alberich, with his ring of gold has made us all slaves! With it he drives us down into the earth to get more gold. This curse of gold has filled our world with despair.”

The gold ring passed from one owner to another, causing misery to all who possessed it until it came into the hands of the beautiful and noble Brunhilde who courageously returned it to the rightful owners, the Rhine-daughters. At long last, gold no longer held power over the hearts of men. Hurry, worry, falsehood, greed and envy vanished from the earth. Anxiety disappeared from the brows of the tired fathers. A new happiness came into the eyes of the mothers. A greater power than gold had come to rule the world, and that power was Love.

You young mothers and young fathers who are closest to the hearts of the rising generation: The heavens are watching and the earth is waiting for you.

May we adopt a new Common Core standard. If we will prepare the hearts of our children to be inspired; if we will give them a vision of wonderful things to hope for; and if we will teach them the right-use of all things in love, we will yet see the rising of that city shining upon a hill seen in vision by our Pilgrim fathers and our ancient prophets.

“And the Gentiles shall come to thy light, and kings to the brightness of thy rising,” saying, “Teach us your ways that we may go home and teach our people, and righteousness will flood the earth, just as Isaiah prophesied.

And our sons and daughters, and their sons and daughters, will be found singing songs of everlasting joy.